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A SERMON

PREACHED

AT ST. DUNSTAN'S IN THE EAST,

ON FRIDAY, THE 19th OF APRIL, 1793;

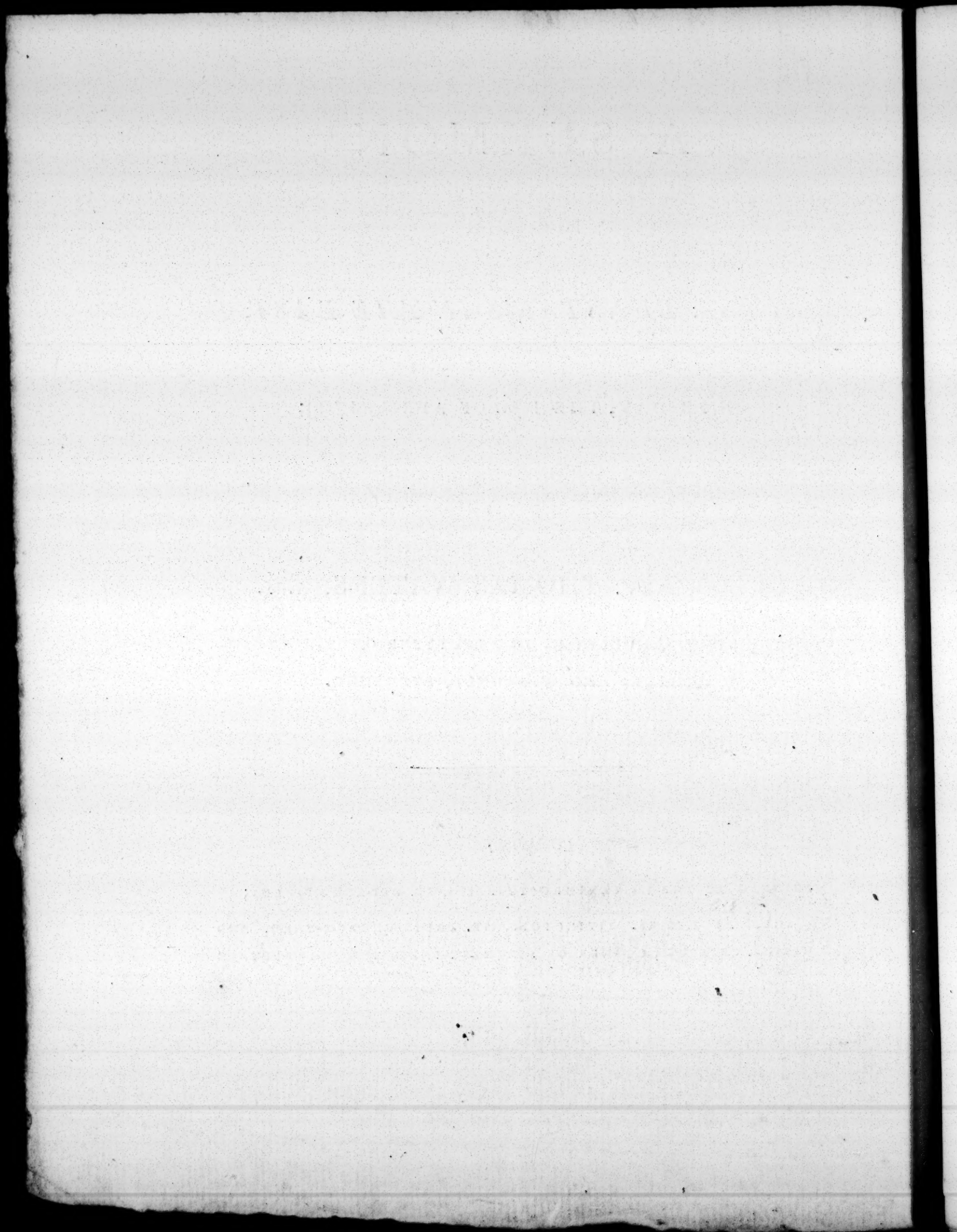
Being the Day appointed for a General Fast.

BY THE REV. THOMAS WATERS, A.M.

CURATE OF THE SAID PARISH, AND LECTURER OF ST. STEPHEN,
WALBROOK; AND ST. BENNET, SHEREHOG.

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11th of JUDGES and Part of the 27th VERSE.

*I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong
to war against me.*

UPON every investigation it is apparent, that the destruction of his creatures can give no satisfaction to the Deity; yet suffering and death may be sacrifices, on the part of man, to his justice; not wantonly required, but necessarily subsequent to certain measures of offence.

Revelation inculcates, that war is a divine judgment, and that it is introduced, as lightnings, earthquakes, or pestilence, to sweep the feeble nations to the dust.

Viewed then as a penalty, and crimes will be presupposed; for as an all-perfect nature cannot inflict punishment, where there has been no offence, when

there is an infliction, the certainty of offence is established.

Thus, considered and it discovers two causes; either that both the involved parties have sinned, and are to be chastized; or that one is to become, in the hands of the Almighty, a scourge unto the other.

This latter sense accounts for assertions in the Old Testament, which seem to represent God, as destroying all nations before Israel, *because he had a favour unto them*—makes it probable, that the nations destroyed had *filled the measure of their iniquity*—and that the Jews possessed the divine favour, and became instruments of punishment, because there were remaining amongst them, some traces of religion and virtue.

Hence may be discovered the most desirable ground to stand upon, when war is inevitable; for, in proportion to the prevailing idea, that the agency and aggression are with the other party, will be the providential dependance for succour and success.

Jeptha, who spake the words of the text in a dispute with the children of Ammon, had such an advantage; for, after an impartial statement of particulars on both sides, he could with justice declare, *I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me.*

The first proposition shall now be applied to England,—and the second to France, with a direct view of producing this inference; that not our offences, but their crimes having been the cause of war, we have every possible reason to confide in Providence, and to expect, that the Divine Blessing will crown ^{our} nor exertions until an honourable peace can be obtained.

The first proof, that we have not sinned against our adversaries, or that we have neither been the agents or aggressors, is the neutrality observed by this country, from the appearance of rebellion on the continent.

There cannot be a doubt, had our intentions been hostile, or our thirst for blood, but there had been justice in an immediate declaration of war; for all

the resentment, due to dissimulation, perfidy, and ingratitude, is due from this country to France:—Its interference between us and our colonies, by which they were torn from our protection, had afforded a sufficient precedent,—had warranted the severest measures,—and to any nation not possessed of equal generosity with the English, the opportunity had no sooner been presented, than the retaliation had been embraced.

When then, notwithstanding former insult and injury, we have been but silent spectators of their conduct, whilst they have laid their country upon the rack, and tortured it with every violence, which irreligion, desperation, and madness could invent, there is sufficient proof that a new constitution might have been established, according with their wishes, had they confined themselves within their own boundaries; nor would they have been molested by us,—unless they had adopted the mad scheme of compelling, by the sword, other countries to receive their principles. It is undeniable then from the time, we remained neutral, that we had no inclination to break the peace, consequently can say to France, in the words of Jephtha to Ammon, *I have not sinned against thee.*

Another proof that we have not sinned against them, or that we have neither been the agents or aggressors in promoting war, is the conduct of our minister.

It is well known at how critical a period he took the helm of state, and to what imminent dangers it was exposed, till, by setting before himself two grand points, as the most eligible and effectual to give relief—namely, *a reduction of the national debt*, and *an abolition of taxes*, he bent its sails towards the haven of prosperity.

There cannot then be a plainer fact, than that his system was laid on the probable basis of a lasting peace; because war, by obstructing the operation of its principles, must necessarily deprive the public, for a time, of the various benefits, which his measures were calculated to produce.

When then public good has appeared, for some years, the clue of his conduct, credit should be given, that it is the first wish of his heart; and then, in proportion to the degree, in which war was seen likely to

procastinate the blessings, before hastening upon the people, must have been his reluctance to the adoption of such a necessity.

That he has uniformly been a friend to peace may be proved from very recent declarations, made in the national convention, of the neutral disposition of the English; and from his keeping off the unpleasant circumstance (for I trust England will not feel it a calamity) till compelled to opposition, by the commencement of hostilities, on the part of the enemy.

Having shewn that our leaders have had no intention to wanton with the blood and treasures of the nation, the measures of the minister being the measures of the majority of power,—we can assert the same of the commonalty:—for the conviction was so strong in favour of peace, as the best interest of the country, that even, when the unanimous voice consented, that Gallic insolence could not any longer be born by British ears, without spirited efforts to chastize, there appeared a general reluctance to involving the land in war;—so that the French may be said to have provoked the *general will* of the English to act against

the *general will*: consequently, if the nation entered upon hostilities with regret, it is impossible to give a stronger proof, that there was compulsion; and if compulsion, then, having neither been the agents or aggressors, we may assert with the noblest confidence, *I have not sinned against thee.*

I shall now apply to France in a few remarks, the latter clause in the text—*thou doest me wrong to war against me.*

England was ill treated by a declaration of war, inasmuch as our pacific disposition was a favour to France; for the general inclination to peace, in this country, was to them an invaluable advantage:—it was therefore against honour and justice, liberality and kindness, that, in an enthusiasm for mistaken liberty, they have classed us with their foes.

Had they continued to have struggled, as at first, but to soften rigours, which they felt oppressive, and to have moderated, with just discrimination, to prevent an abuse of power, strictly observant of respect to their sovereign and the nobility, they had received con-

siderable, if not universal approbation:—Had they, as an enlightened people, really preferred the cultivation of peace, and, influenced by a philanthropic resolution, determined no more to make offensive war, the heart under the influence of Christianity had applauded; but when no fixed principles governed their measures, and revolution succeeded revolution,—when from an oppressed people, desiring only a redress of grievance, they overthrew the constitution, and, regardless of their earlier resolves, burst forth on all sides on their peaceable neighbours;—when, like barbarians, they scattered the face of nature with human carcases, and levied intolerable contributions on the unfortunate, who fell into their hands, the existence of communities and the balance of power required, that such a career should be checked;—particularly when an industrious people, our ally, was in danger of becoming a prey to an host of lawless invaders;—for there would have been a palpable defection from principle and honour, had not Britain extended her hand, in the moment of danger, to protect her friends, and to convince her enemies, that they were strangely infatuated in supposing, that the surrounding nations would timidly bend to their yoke, or tamely submit to be plundered and massacred.

The necessity of interference then, under such compulsive circumstances, shews *them* both the agents and aggressors; and consequently justifies *our* asserting, as in the text, *thou doest me wrong to war against me.*

To decree also, that all monarchy is tyranny, and that all monarchs should be destroyed, to encourage seditious men to attempt the overthrow of governments, and declare themselves ready to assist *all*, who should feel themselves *given to change*, were general insults to every nation under such a form of government:—and a declaration of war, because their new national character was not immediately acknowledged, after the barbarous murder of their lawful sovereign, was a particular insult to this country, which every true Englishman must feel and acknowledge, should be spiritedly resented.

In apology for France, it has been asserted, that, when assistance in the cause of freedom was proposed, those countries only ^{be}were intended, in which similar sentiments might have been the *general will*:—This declaration, however, will not justify their conduct; because

the government of other countries cannot be their province, till called upon by the consent of all nations to give laws to the world :—In fact, their intention by *assistance* was to excite *rebellion*, and their explanation, *the general will*, a subterfuge, when they perceived that they had miscarried in disturbing the tranquility of their neighbours, and apprehended their resentment.—As yet, however, no such aspect has appeared, nor can this country be reproached, that, at any time, its *general will* has favoured such destructive measures : and if not, upon their own explanation, what have they to do with us?—or why have they declared themselves at war?—Surely there is a famine in *Canaan*, and they seek a *Goshen*,—*their country is become unto them desolate*, and they are striving to *enlarge their borders*,—they are vagabonds upon the face of the earth, and wish to prowl for plunder, in the habitations of the industrious and wealthy.

If ever then there were a time, when the causes of war were generally satisfactory, it is the present, when atheists, barbarians, regicides, and men, who declare that children, like beasts, may forget their parents

and be forgotten, are endeavouring, after having obliterated from themselves the traces of a polished nation, to involve, in one common ruin, the whole world.

Surely, against such a banditti a stand should be made with inflexible determination, and perfect unanimity.—There should not be an individual a dissident:—all, who are, should feel and act as Englishmen, that every possible exertion may be contributed to give strength and effect to such measures, as the wisdom of government may think proper to adopt against our enemies, under a full conviction that *we have not sinned against them, but that they have done wrong in making war against us.*

From this statement of facts, it must appear, that we have been forced into every step taken; and, having neither been the agents or aggressors, may hope, that we are not the nation to be punished, but the nation in the hand of God to chastize; consequently have every possible reason to expect, that our exertions will be crowned with the Divine Blessing, until an honourable peace can be obtained.

The legislature, wisely considering, that the *race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong*, has set apart this day for prayer, humiliation and fasting;—that a just God may respect the dependance of his creatures in a just cause, and go forth with our fleets and armies, *their leader and their strength*.

The propriety of the appointment is obvious; for war, considered as divine anger impending guilty nations, is most likely to be averted by sincere penitence.

Let us first humble ourselves before God for our personal offences, and the sins of our country, resolving, by his grace, so to improve his long-suffering and mercy, that they may produce in us repentance and amendment; let us lament with the deepest sorrow the dreadful calamities of the continent; where moral evil hath drawn the sword, but to stain it with human blood;—and let us *pray, through Jesus Christ, for the peace of Jerusalem*, that it may prosper in all nations.

It will also be necessary, after having committed our cause to God, to place full confidence in government, by a chearful obedience to the laws, and by

a firm adherence together, until property and personal security be sufficiently protected; for however, in religious and political sentiments, we may disagree, a time of danger is not a time for such discussions; *then*, when wives, children, and fortunes are at stake, every Englishman should shew himself a hero, and determine to preserve them or perish.

At the same time also that we bow to the Father of Mercies, through Jesus Christ, for the pardon of our sins, and that we acknowledge, both individually and nationally, that we deserve calamity, let us be persuaded, that, in the present case, we have extraordinary encouragement; and as the veteran, who takes the sword, and exposes his life, as well as the statesman at home, who designs his operations,—the minister, whose duty it is to pray for his country and its freedom, as well as the merchant, whose stores are the sinews of its strength, are all satisfied that the cause is just; there is every reason to hope, under the direction of infinite wisdom, that our exertions will propitiously terminate.

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Let us then believe that the Lord of Hosts is with us, that our sword is in his hand, and his approbation in our cause:—Dependant on his strength may we go forward, until he bring forth conquest unto victory, and drive our enemies to their gates:—Then, in the grateful acclamations of success, may we return to sit down in peace under our own vine and figtree;—Happy in our king and constitution,—happy in the free exercise of our religion,—happy in the charming intercourses of moral, social and domestic pleasure, and happy in the active cultivation of all that can inspire to riches and honour,—to virtue and morality—to friendship and religion:—Thus, respected abroad, and united at home, the evening of life will be serene; peace will be to our walls, plenteousness to our dwellings, and we shall transmit to our sons and to our daughters a land, the glory of the earth, and both civil and religious privileges, the most valuable in the world.

THE END.

